



Affirmation:

United Methodists for Gay and Lesbian Concerns

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REPORT FROM LA

April, 1983

This is a short-deadline special edition of the Affirmation newsletter issued to give our network immediate information about our recent national meeting, particularly plans related to General Conference and to our meeting in Baltimore this Fall.

Ecumenical Celebration Meeting Opener

An ecumenical liturgy planned by the host Pacific and Southwest Affirmation group provided a challenging upbeat tone to the LA weekend. Participants included Marsha Langford, President of Integrity International, Chris Glasser, parish coordinator of West Hollywood Presbyterian Church, and Ignacio Castuera, Superintendent of the Los Angeles District of the United Methodist Church. Invited guests represented member groups of the Los Angeles Lesbian and Gay Religious Coalition, Methodist Federation for Social Action, and other supportive persons.

Worshippers heard Mary Gaddis compare the dis-ease of homophobia to the disease of cancer. Mary, one of Affirmation's national spokespersons, told the congregation that it is our choice whether to be a victor or a victim and that the experiencing of loving and being loved offers the healing power which makes it possible to be a victor over dis-ease and disease.

Morris Floyd, preaching on the text John 20: 19-23 continued the theme by urging hearers to claim the power of the Resurrection to "move beyond the locked doors of fear and frustration, apparently unable to control our lives." He said this means no longer approaching the institutional church as apologetic supplicants. Instead, gay and lesbian Christians should claim the Resurrection promise that God's love can overcome even the most virulent hatred and fear and hold the institution accountable for its failure to be in authentic ministry with its lesbian and gay members. Acknowledging that this approach may provoke additional rejecting behaviors, Floyd said rejection should be seen not as defeat but as victory because a defensive reaction means that "somebody is getting the radical message." He said, "We need not spend time agonizing over rejection - an inhospitable institution which gang rapes and victimizes God's marginalized messengers will reap the same reward as Sodom and Gomorrah." Claiming the Resurrection means "knowing the reality of God's reign in our own lives and living as representatives of that faith-filled and spirit-empowered community so as to bring that reign alive in the institutional church and amongst all our brothers and sisters everywhere."

Local United Methodists Offer Limited Hospitality

Despite the Discipline's mandate for ministry with lesbian and gay people (Para. 71F), UM congregations in LA limited their openness to Affirmation so much that most of our meeting was held at West Hollywood Presbyterian Church. The local arrangements committee declined with regret the invitation of one UM church located far from the LA lesbian/gay community. UM churches located in the heart of the gay/lesbian community either refused to host the business portions of the meeting or imposed unacceptable limits for use of their space. Affirmation members expressed thanks to Tom Reinhart-Marean, pastor of Crescent Heights UMC in west Hollywood, at whose insistence that church made space available for the meeting's opening Ecumenical celebration and reception.

Sharing Creates Supportive/Exciting Atmosphere

Attendees spent the first two hours of the meeting introducing themselves and being introduced to each other by sharing the joys, pains, confusion and concerns they and their communities experience. Subsequent reports from task forces about Affirmation's work in progress around the country produced reactions of amazement at

how much we are doing:

- Significant educational efforts in six annual conferences sparked by Affirmation groups.
- Networking with other UM groups interested in Affirmation's agenda. These groups include both unofficial caucuses such as MFSA and official UMC agencies.
- supporting General Boards in their efforts to fulfill the Discipline's call for ministry with gay men and lesbians.
- planning for Affirmation's ministry with the General Conference, spearheaded by a committee which met last Fall in New York. At the recommendation of the Coordinating Committee, the group expressed appreciation for work done to date and approved a detailed articulation of General Conference strategy. (A complete statement of these plans and opportunities for involvement by Affirmation members will be published in our next complete newsletter, due out in early June.)

Social Justice Task Force Created

A Social Justice Task Force will implement Affirmation's determination to be in solidarity with other oppressed groups and on other social justice matters. The task force will monitor emerging issues, provide information to our membership about the linkages between these concerns and particular gay/lesbian issues, and recommend methods by which Affirmation members can act to be in solidarity. Examples of issues to be considered include the

nuclear freeze and militarism, Latin America, concerns of racism and class exploitation, and health care. Workshops on these matters will be among those offered participants in September's meeting.

Participants expressed appreciation for this new task force because reflects our broad interests without abandoning Affirmation's primary focus: enabling the church's faithful response to ministry by and with gay men and lesbians. Such a response is most likely and most meaningful within the context of a renewed United Methodist commitment to social justice expressed in both theology and practice.

Travel Pool Works - Continuation Planned

The commitment of west coast Affirmation participants made the travel pool for this meeting achieve its desired effect of spreading costs across a broader base. Each member's share of the travel pool amounted to approximately \$100. Though it raises the expense for persons nearby, the travel pool supports Affirmation's intent to be a mutually supportive community which makes affirmative efforts to include persons with limited financial resources in its meeting. Based on this success, Affirmation expressed its intent to continue the travel pool at subsequent meetings. a more complete description of how the pool worked, and one member's reflection on its meaning will appear in our next newsletter.

AIDS Statement

The newly-created Social Justice Task Force created a statement of concern about AIDS, the

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome currently affecting gay men, among other groups, in epidemic proportions. The statement encourages Affirmation members to be involved with AIDS programs in their local communities, to advocate for adequate research and treatment funding by local, state and federal authorities, and to avoid the oppressive trap of blaming the victim for AIDS. The full text of the statement will be printed in our June newsletter.

Fall Meeting Plans Announced

The Coordinating Committee completed preliminary plans for Affirmation's meeting September 15-18 in the Baltimore/Washington area. The meeting will include content workshops on several topics of interest and will including time for building community and developing support among participants in addition completing plans for our General Conference presence. The Coordinating Committee and persons interested in being a part of core working groups will gather Thursday evening (9/15) and work most of the day Friday. The national Affirmation meeting will begin with a celebration on Friday evening. June's newsletter will include a complete description and registration information. Plan now to attend!

General Conference Task Force

Persons participating in the General Conference planning process are encouraged to hold Friday evening and Saturday August 5 and 6 for a working meeting at a mid-Atlantic location to be announced (details in June).